
# CARIM India – Developing a Knowledge Base for Policymaking on India-EU Migration

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# *Indian Migration to Belgium*

**Sara Cosemans**

**Idesbald Goddeeris**

CARIM-India Research Report 2013/45




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**Developing a knowledge base for policymaking on India-EU migration**

**Research Report**
**Case Study**

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# Indian Migration to Belgium


## Sara Cosemans[(1)]
## Idesbald Goddeeris[(2)]

(1) Sara Cosemans obtained a MA in History at the KU Leuven in 2011. Her MA thesis on Sikh migration to Belgium won in 2012 the Gülen Chair for Intercultural Studies Award. She continued her education at Columbia University and the London School of Economics in a Dual MA/MSc Program in International and World History (2012-1014). At Columbia University, Sara Cosemans received the Judge J. Weinstein Fellowship for oral history (2013). She received scholarships from Fulbright Belgium (2012-13) and Rotary Belgium (2013-14).

(2) Idesbald Goddeeris is Associate Professor of History at KU Leuven, where he teaches, inter alia, History of European Colonization, History of India, and Global Perspectives on Modern India. He has published extensively on migration history and cold war history, and has recently edited a volume on the contacts between Belgium and India (Leuven University Press, 2013).

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European University Institute
Badia Fiesolana
I – 50014 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)
Italy

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**CARIM-India – Developing a knowledge base for policymaking on India-EU migration**

This project is co-financed by the European Union and carried out by the EUI in partnership with the Indian Council of Overseas Employment, (ICOE), the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore Association, (IIMB), and Maastricht University (Faculty of Law).

The proposed action is aimed at consolidating a constructive dialogue between the EU and India on migration covering all migration-related aspects. The objectives of the proposed action are aimed at:

- Assembling high-level Indian-EU expertise in major disciplines that deal with migration (demography, economics, law, sociology and politics) with a view to building up migration studies in India. This is an inherently international exercise in which experts will use standardised concepts and instruments that allow for aggregation and comparison. These experts will belong to all major disciplines that deal with migration, ranging from demography to law and from economics to sociology and political science.
- Providing the Government of India as well as the European Union, its Member States, the academia and civil society, with:
    1. Reliable, updated and comparative information on migration
    2. In-depth analyses on India-EU highly-skilled and circular migration, but also on low-skilled and irregular migration.
- Making research serve action by connecting experts with both policy-makers and the wider public through respectively policy-oriented research, training courses, and outreach programmes.

These three objectives will be pursued with a view to developing a knowledge base addressed to policy-makers and migration stakeholders in both the EU and India.

Results of the above activities are made available for public consultation through the website of the project: http://www.india-eu-migration.eu/

*For more information:*
CARIM-India
Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (EUI)
Convento
Via delle Fontanelle 19
50014 San Domenico di Fiesole
Italy
Tel: +39 055 46 85 817
Fax: + 39 055 46 85 770
Email: India-EU.Migration@eui.eu

**Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies**
http://www.eui.eu/RSCAS/

## Abstract

The Indian diaspora in Belgium mirrors the heterogeneity of the Indian nation. There are several religious and ethnic groups of Indian immigrants who barely interact with each other. Sikhs who settled from the 1980s onwards in the fruit region of Hesbaye constitute the largest group. Diamond workers, many of them Jains from Gujarat, began to move to Antwerp in the 1950s but became more prevalent from the mid-1970s. Over the last decade, the number of Indian ICT workers also increased significantly.

This paper will discuss the Indian presence in Belgium. First, it introduces the reader to the different groups by providing a historical overview of their presence in the country. Afterwards, it discusses the diaspora in a more quantitative way and presents the available statistics of recent years. Finally, it focuses on issues such as their associations and religious life.

The paper is based on a variety of research, both on an MA and PhD level. Over the past few years, a number of history students wrote MA theses under the supervision of one of the authors, Idesbald Goddeeris (Cloet 2011, Bossens 2011, Boon 2013). Among these students was the co-author, Sara Cosemans, who published her thesis as a monograph and has written several articles and chapters since. Her latest contribution is a book chapter to a volume on the historical contacts between Belgium and India (edited by Goddeeris), which she co-authored with Hannelore Roos, an anthropologist who in October 2013 defended a PhD dissertation on Indian ICT workers and diamond traders. The latter group is also studied by Chris De Lauwer, among others. All of this research is based on primary sources, such as interviews, quantitative data, press, etc. This paper is the first attempt to give a general overview for an international readership.

## 1. An introduction to the main Indian communities in Belgium

*Sikhs*

The Sikh community is perhaps the most visible of all Indian communities in Belgium. A large number of Belgian Sikhs maintain the markers of their faith: unmodified hair (including beards) and turbans. Belgians' contact with the Sikh appearance dates back to the First World War, when Sikhs were the most prominent soldiers of the British Army fighting in Flanders Fields. However, it took until 1972 for the first Sikhs to settle in Belgium. They did not come from Punjab in India, but from Uganda where the Indian community had been expelled by dictator Idi Amin Dada. Belgium agreed on the permanent resettlement of approximately 175 Ugandan Asian refugees of all faith groups, including eight Sikh families.

The real flow of Sikhs from Punjab is a phenomenon that started in the mid-1980s. They were mainly young men that fled the violent turmoil between the Indian government of PM Indira Gandhi and the Sikhs. Many of them had linkages to the Khalistani movement that fought for an independent state. Though they sought refuge, they were not granted the status of refugees, rendering their stay in Belgium illegal.[1] These young men mainly settled around the city of Saint-Trond (Limburg) where the agricultural sector required large amounts of seasonal workers – vacancies that were hard to fill without migrant labor.[2] Their legal status remained precarious until the year 2000, when a large-scale regularization allowed them to regulate their stay and to obtain Belgian nationality. This development generated new migration movements of Sikhs – especially in the form of family reunification and family formation. The predominantly male community was joined by an increasing number of women and children that have since put their stamp on the outlook of and the dynamics within the community.

The position of the Sikhs in Belgium was consolidated throughout the first decade of the new century as the community expanded and more people obtained the Belgian citizenship. Simultaneously, however, the Sikhs lost their position in the fruit-farming region to labor migrants from the new member states of the EU, namely Polish guest workers. They shifted towards jobs with more certainty and less demanding work regiments. They started their own fruit farms and opened small (night) shops or sought work in the factories of the region. Meanwhile, they became more dispersed and settled in larger industrial cities throughout the country. Today, apart from Limburg large Sikh populations can also be found in the Brussels-Capital Region, Antwerp, and Liège.

*Diamond traders*

India and Antwerp are diamonds' best friends. India was the sole country where diamonds were exploited until their discovery in Brazil in 1714 and South Africa in 1867. Antwerp was a hub in the trade with the Indies and developed into a diamond capital in the early modern era. It did not hold this position permanently, eventually competing with London, Amsterdam, and other cities, but reappeared as the world leader of diamond trade in the 20th century. In 2000, Belgium accounted for 14.1% of the

[1] Note for the file. Position of Indian Asylum Seekers in Belgium, 20 September 1983; 100.BEL.IND; Refugees from India in Belgium, Series 2, Classified Subject Files; Fonds 11, Records of the Central Registry; Archives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The UNHCR archives contain a letter from a Belgian lawyer representing five "Indian asylum seekers" to the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees and a subsequent report on Indian asylum seekers in Belgium mention the presence of 400 to 500 "followers of the Khalistani movement" whose claim of the refugee status has been rejected. After "Operation Bluestar" in 1984, their numbers only rose.

[2] Sara Cosemans, Meneer Singh En Mevrouw Kaur in België. Migratie, Gender En Integratie in de Sikh-Gemeenschap, Gülen Chair for Intercultural Studies Award Series 1 (Leuven: Acco, 2012), 56–57.

global import and 25.9% of the global export of diamonds.[3] In 2013, Antwerp was still the largest diamond hub in the world, hosting four major diamond exchanges and more than 1,500 diamond companies that generate a $50-55 billion turnover per year.[4]

In the first decades after the Second World War, Jews dominated the Antwerp diamond industry and trade. In the 1980s, one third of the cutters and three quarters of the traders belonged to the Jewish community. However, Indians gradually expanded their position in the field. Already in 1953, Kirtilai Manilal Mehta founded the first Indian diamond trade company in Belgium: Gem of Belgium, which grew into the global trader Gembel Group. The government of India supported this development. In 1956, it permitted Indian diamonds to be exported and in 1959 it decided to reimburse all import rights of rough diamonds to Indian exporters of cut diamonds. In other words, it fueled the Indian purchase of rough diamonds in Antwerp, their transport to and treatment in India, and their return to Antwerp for sale on the global market. In 1969, 57% of Indian exported diamonds found their way to Belgium. At the time, the industry was still in Jewish hands, but following the economic crisis of 1973, the reduced employment in the diamond sector, and the rise of growing economies in Asia with a growing demand for jewelry, Indians took over their position. They specialized in small stones, *melee*, the production of which did not require great skill and could be outsourced to cutters in India. However, they also expanded to other sectors. In 1990, 40% of the diamond dealers in Belgium were of Indian origin. In 2010, that number had risen to 60-70% - at least according to the Antwerp World Diamond Center. Unofficial sources estimate the Indian share in the Antwerp trade to be as large as 80%.[5] The most famous companies are, inter alia, Eurostar Diamond Traders, Rose Blue, Jayam, Supergems, Indigems, and Diarough. In 2006, five of the eleven board members of the Antwerp World Diamond Centre were Indian. The Centre was led by a diamond merchant of Indian origin, Nishit Parikh, for the first time in 2010. The Belgian state increasingly recognizes this position. In 2006, the Belgian king Albert II awarded the title of baron to Dilip Mehta, who emigrated from India to Belgium in 1973 and acquired Belgian citizenship in 2001.

Today, about five hundred Indian families live in Antwerp. Most of them belong to a small number of big families, such as the Mehta, Shah, Bhansali, Javeri, Choksi, and Parikh. The majority of them – about three hundred – are Jains, but there are also two hundred Hindu families and a small number of Christian Indians in Antwerp. The pioneers come from Gujarat and belong to the Palanpuri community. The Marwaris – a community of traders from the region Marwar in Rajasthan – are also well represented. Over the last decades, the Kathiawaris have increasingly gained position. This community of farmers has also in India become renowned as a dominant force of India's diamond trade.[6] The competition leads to tension, but it is very difficult for outsiders to gain perspective on the conflicts. Importantly, an increasing number work in sectors other than the diamond trade. They are employed in banks or run restaurants and shops. Still, many live in a concentrated area around the Central Station and the City Park, where many Jews also reside.

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[3] Hannelore Roos and Sara Cosemans, "Een Reis Langs Vele Wegen. De Indiase Diaspora in België," in *Het Wiel van Ashoka. Belgisch-Indiase Contacten in Historisch Perspectief*, ed. Idesbald Goddeeris (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2013), 213–231; Gerrit De Vylder, "Van Belgische Expansie Tot Indiase Heropstanding. Economische Relaties Tussen India En België van 1830 Tot Heden," in *Het Wiel van Ashoka. Belgisch-Indiase Contacten in Historisch Perspectief* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2013), 58–60; Hannelore Roos and Stephanie Vervaet, "Diamantsteden: Knoopunten van Transnationale Vertrouwensnetwerken," *Agora. Magazine Voor Sociaalruimtelijke Vraagstukken* 26, no. 2 (2010): 23–27.

[4] Bain & Company, Inc., *The Global Diamond Report 2013. Journey through the Value Chain*, 2013, 40.

[5] Jeroen Verelst, "België: Diamanthandel, Een Zaak van Indiërs," *Presseurop.eu: European News, Cartoons and Press Reviews*, accessed November 13, 2013, http://www.presseurop.eu/nl/content/article/216031-diamanthandel-een-zaak-van-indiers.

[6] Summit Khanna, "After Years, Kathiawaris Outshine Palanpuris in India Diamond Biz," *India - DNA*, accessed November 13, 2013, http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-after-years-kathiawaris-outshine-palanpuris-in-india-diamond-biz-1156574.

*ICT workers*

Information and communications technology (ICT) workers constitute the latest distinct group of Indian immigrants in Belgium. Over the last decade, an increasing number have immigrated to Brussels and its periphery. Anno 2013, at least a couple thousand live in Belgium. The bulk are active in the outsourcing sector.

Many multinationals indeed put out parts of their tasks to Indian companies, which are globally renowned for their ICT skills. This expertise results from a decade-long concentration on high-level education, but can also be attributed to the fact that India is a low-wage country. In particular the Indian development of new software programs and their support of databases, websites, and invoicing or distribution systems appeals to many Western companies. Some of them work with companies in India itself (*offshoring*); others prefer to work with Indian employees at their foreign branches (*outsourcing*), which they find more secure given the confidential information and trade secrets. Indian ICT service companies initially settled in the US and the UK, but have now also discovered the European continent. Tata Consultancy Services has been active in Belgium since 1992. Infosys opened an office in Brussels in 1999. The [Indian] National Institute of Information Technology has had a representation in Belgium since that same year. In 2003, Mahindra Satyam also began setting up projects in Belgium.[7]

These Belgian branches of Indian companies mostly employ Indians with a very homogeneous profile. Their workers are young, predominantly in the age category of 25 to 35. They are mostly male bachelors: fewer women work in the ICT sector and families are less eager to migrate. They are highly educated and have at least one BA or MA diploma of engineering studies. They belong to the growing Indian middle class and are highly esteemed by their families in India.

Another common feature is high mobility and flexibility. Indian ICT workers come to Belgium for a temporary stay (or at least initially plan to do so). They move from one country to another, either within the same company or for a competitor. Many of them prefer to work for an Indian company (or for the Belgian branch of a multinational that is also active in India, such as IBM India), since this provides a safety net in case of redundancy or dismissal. Only a limited number work for a Belgian company or have established a proper company. Yet, these pioneers may be the trailblazers of an increasing number of workers who come for a short stay but eventually settle in Belgium.

Of course, this overview is not comprehensive. A considerable number of Indians work in other sectors. A typical South Asian niche of ethnic entrepreneurship are “night shops”: small convenience stores in big cities that are only open after dark. The presence of such shops has mushroomed in Belgian cities over the last decade. In 2010 there were 29 night shops in Leuven, 88 in Ghent, 200 in Antwerp and even more in Brussels. Most of them are run by South Asians. In Leuven, for instance, there are 10 shop-owners from Pakistan, 6 from Nepal, 6 from Bangladesh, 5 from India, 1 from Bhutan and 1 from an unknown country of origin. The vast majority of them have been living in Belgium for more than ten years and obtained Belgian citizenship. Their overrepresentation in the sector can possibly be attributed to their limited proficiency of Dutch and French and their low level of education, which makes it difficult to find work in the Belgian service economy. However, their cultural and social capital contributes: other European countries also host considerable numbers of South Asian self-employed workers. Moreover, it is related to concrete elements, such as the fact that these shop-owners were able to save starting capital while working in other sectors and that their older age does not allow them to do hard labor in factories.[8]

[7] Hans Vandecandelaere, In Brussel: Een Reis Door de Wereld (Berchem: EPO, 2012), 288.

[8] Nele Bossens, “Hoe Later Op de Avond, Hoe Schoner Het Volk. Zuid-Aziatische Nachtwinkeluitbaters in Leuven” (Unpublished MA Thesis, KU Leuven, 2011).

## 2. Demographic Characteristics of the Indian population

According to the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs, Belgium currently hosts 18,000 of the nearly 22 million Indians living overseas. Out of 205 countries, Belgium occupies 30th place. Among the E.U. countries, it takes 10th place. The Indian government usually divides the diaspora into two major categories: Non-Resident Indian (NRI) and Person of Indian Origin (PIO). These categories are also useful in the Belgian context to distinguish between people with Indian nationality on the one hand, and Belgians of Indian origin on the other.

**Table 1. Indian statistics on its Diaspora**

| | Country | Overseas Indians living abroad | Non-Resident Indian (NRI) | Person of Indian Origin (PIO) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | United Kingdom | 1,500,000 | 1,500,000 | 0 |
| **2** | Netherlands (*) | 215,000 | 20,000 | 195,000 |
| **3** | Italy | 99,127 | 97,719 | 1,408 |
| **4** | Portugal | 80,000 | 11,272 | 68,728 |
| **5** | Germany | 70,500 | 42,500 | 28,000 |
| **6** | France (*) | 65,000 | 10,000 | 55,000 |
| **7** | Spain | 30,000 | 15,000 | 15,000 |
| **8** | Austria | 23,000 | 12,000 | 11,000 |
| **9** | Ireland | 19,365 | 18,018 | 1,347 |
| **10** | Belgium | 18,000 | 7,000 | 11,000 |

(*) Only including Dutch and French territories on the European continent. Dutch and French overseas territories have long-standing histories of hosting large Indian communities.[9]

However, the categories are not as straightforward as they seem. In Belgium, the law restricts the use of many of the ethnic and racial categories commonly used in Anglo-Saxon countries. This poses a statistical problem when migrants adopt Belgian nationality. In the statistics they appear as Belgians, but for matters of policy, Belgian demographers and politicians are also interested in the roots of the "new Belgians." In order to determine the size of migrant communities (including Belgian nationals) in society, Belgian demographers need to find other indicators of people's origin. They use "nationality at the moment of birth" and "nationality of parents" to estimate the amount of people of foreign descent in Belgium. The statistical shortcoming of this method is that the data can only be analysed from one generation prior. Grandchildren of Belgians of foreign descent are no longer traceable in the records. Since the Indian diaspora in Belgium is a fairly recent phenomenon, this effect is still minimal.[10] Therefore, the Belgian statistical analyses as generated by the *Centre de recherche en démographie et sociétés* (DEMO – Université Catholique the Louvain) still correspond quite closely to the Indian statistics on Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) and Persons of Indian Origin

[9] Source: "India and its Diaspora." Ministry of Overseas Affairs, 18-10-2012. Accessed 18-09-2013. http://moia.gov.in/accessories.aspx?aid=10.

[10] Centrum voor Gelijkheid van Kansen en Racismebetrijding, *Migraties en Migrantenpopulaties in België*, Statistisch en Demografisch Verslag 2010 (Brussels, 2011), 131 and 147–171.

(PIOs) in Belgium.[11] In this report, the well-known Indian terminology is therefore preferred over the Belgian one.

Note on Belgian data gathering and processing: Belgium began ten-year censuses in the mid-nineteenth century, but discontinued this tradition in 1991. In 2001, the DGSIE held a nationwide socio-economic survey. Although extremely useful, this was a single event that was and will not be repeated. The censuses and the survey both combined statistical data and demographic analyses. After 2001, however, the National Register decided to publish only numbers. They are available online from 2001 until 2006. More recent data are forthcoming. The discontinuity of reporting demographic data makes the information landscape in Belgium complicated and of very varying quality. The quality of data is high for the years 1981 and 1991 and between 2001 and 2006. For all other years the data are only partially or not available.

For the study of Indian migration to Belgium, this is inconvenient, since the phenomenon is so recent that it is not even included in older analyses. Even the socio-economic survey of 2001 does not mention evolutions within the Indian community. However, the combination of data (migrant stock, visa-applications, etc.) allow the reconstruction of some of the migration patterns of Indians to Belgium.

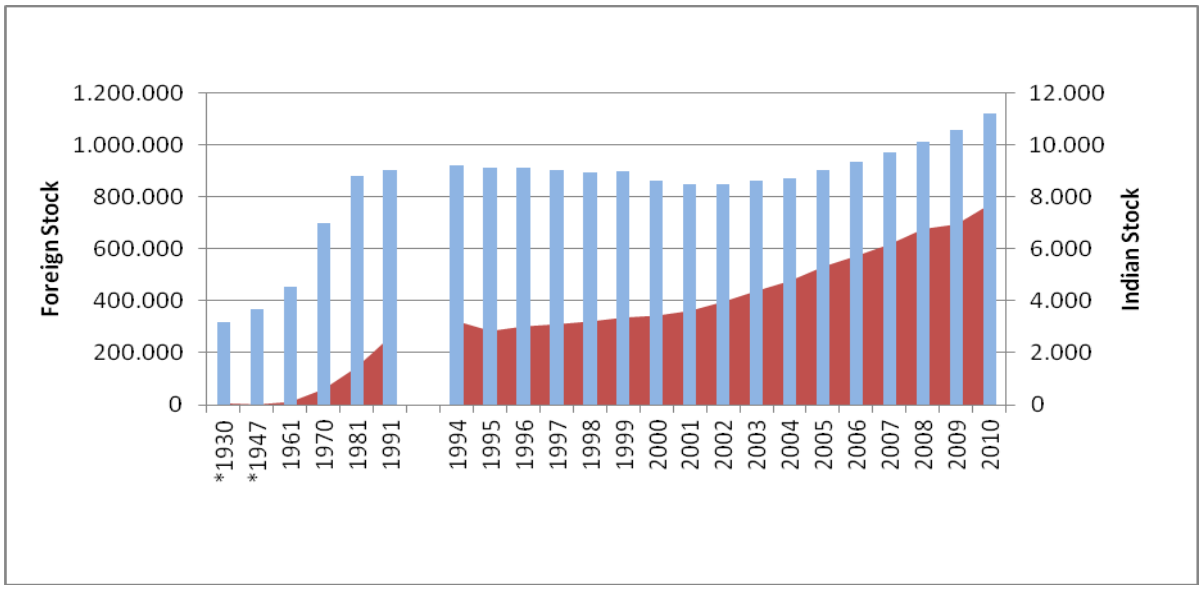
*Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) in Belgium*

As said, the Indian diaspora in Belgium is a relatively new phenomenon. It is small in comparison to other migrant populations (primarily E.U. citizens, especially from the neighboring countries, but also non-E.U. immigrants such as Congolese, Turks and Moroccans). The lack of colonial ties and economic (labor) connections are important elements of explanation. Non-Resident Indians do not even constitute one percent of foreign stock in Belgium though the importance of the community is growing.

Figure 1 allows a comparison of the entire foreign population (blue columns corresponding to the left y-axis) against the number of Indian population (red field corresponding to the right y-axis) in Belgium. The first available data for Indian migration from the Belgian national censuses of 1930 and 1947 include the territories of what after 1947 became Pakistan and Bangladesh. However, the numbers of migrants from the Subcontinent in the years before independence were insignificant: 52 and 8 respectively.

[11] In the future, as the community grows and reproduces itself in Belgium, larger discrepancies between Belgian and Indian data are expected.

**Figure 1. Foreign Population and NRIs since 1930**




Sources: Censuses until 1991 - Directorate-general Statistics and Economic information (DGSEI) from 1991 onwards. The asterisk indicates the result for pre-partition India (today's India, Pakistan and Bangladesh).

After a period of rapid growth between the 1970s and 1980s, the graph suggests a subtle decline of the total foreign population in the mid-1990s. Yet, this did not actually happen. The graph is rather the reflection of a change in Belgian statistical record keeping of migration that took place in 1995. From that year onwards, asylum-seekers and candidate refugees no longer were incorporated in official migration statistics, but moved to a newly created register: the Waiting List. The decision to exclude the data from the Waiting List in official migration calculations is a statistical "correction" that is overall deplored by demographers working on migration in Belgium. Without this data, the representation of migrants residing in Belgium is distorted.[12] In the curve of the NRIs, the decline in 1995 is also visible in but is less significant. In fact, the number of NRIs slowly but steadily increased during the 1990s, mainly due to the growing influence of diamond traders in Antwerp.

In the year 2000, the increased flexibility of Belgian nationality law caused a new drop of the total foreign population. Many migrants that had resided in Belgium for a longer time earned Belgian citizenship using the quicker procedures. After 2002, however, the foreign population (even without taking asylum-seekers into account) started growing again due to an expanding migration balance, a relatively small but positive natural growth of the foreign population, and a stabilization of the number of people adopting the Belgian nationality.[13]

The community of Indian nationals in Belgium does not show a similar downfall in 2000. On the contrary, the NRI community starts to grow more rapidly from 2000 onwards. Apparently, the option of nationality change was less appealing to NRIs in 2000.[14] The nature of the job market for Indians in Belgium – especially the diamond business and the ICT sector – stimulates the maintaining of

[12] The distortion is especially significant since asylum has become an important fast-expanding category in Belgian migration policy from the early 1990s onwards. For details see: Centrum voor Gelijkheid van Kansen en Racismebetrijding, Migraties en Migrantenpopulaties in België, 7–8.

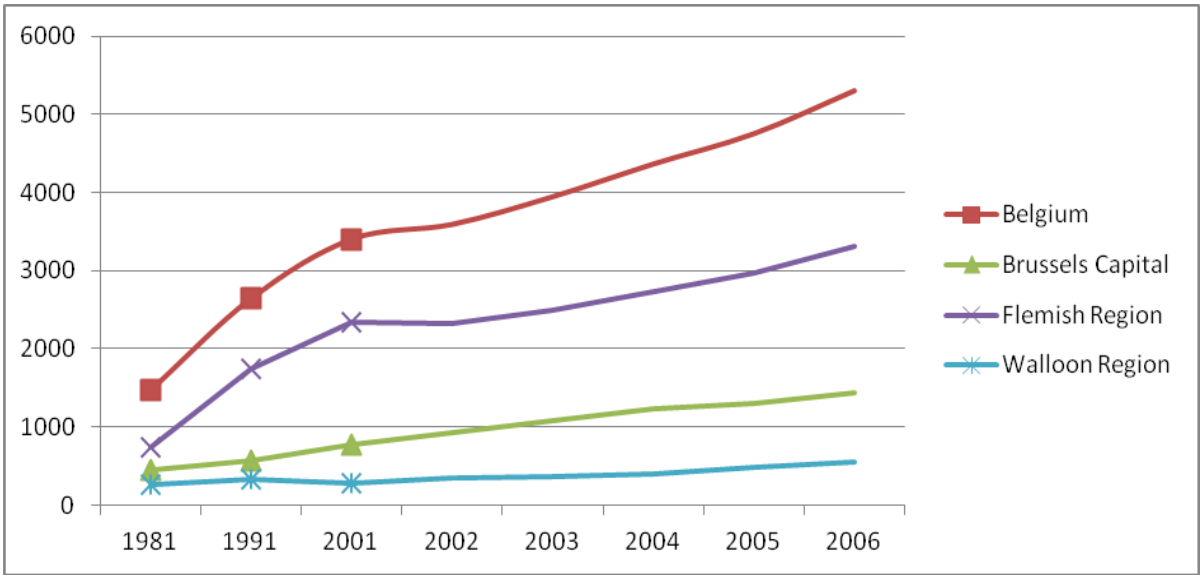
[13] Ibid., 105.

[14] Nevertheless, the period in the aftermath of 2000 did see an increase of Belgians of Indian origin: mainly people who first had to regulate their stay before obtaining citizenship (cfr. infra: Persons of Indian Origin in Belgium and Irregular Migration from India to Belgium).

relations with India. The idea of permanent settlement in Belgium as a Belgian national is less appealing to this transnational working population.

Indian NRIs are mostly located in the Flemish Region: around Antwerp's diamond community, in the "ICT Zone" (the axis between Nivelles, Brussels and Mechelen) and to a much lesser extent in the agricultural region of Limburg. Brussels Capital attracts a smaller, however, still significant amount of Indian immigrants. The presence of Indians in the Walloon Region is modest and mainly concentrated in large industrial cities such as Liège and Charleroi. Figure 2 gives a more detailed overview of the evolution of Indian nationals in Belgium for the period 1981-2006.

**Figure 2. Evolution of the number of NRIs per region.**




Sources: Census 1981, 1991 – Socio-economic Survey 2001 – Belgian National Register from 2001 onwards.

*Visa applications and work permits*

Despite their small numbers, Indian migrants have in recent years asserted themselves as an important factor in the Belgian job market. Indians became the number one population to apply for – and receive – visas for professional activities in Belgium.[15] Employment is the main reason for migration, followed by familial and educational reasons. This is revealed in figure 3, which depicts the numbers and the types of visa applications by Indian citizens over the last five years.

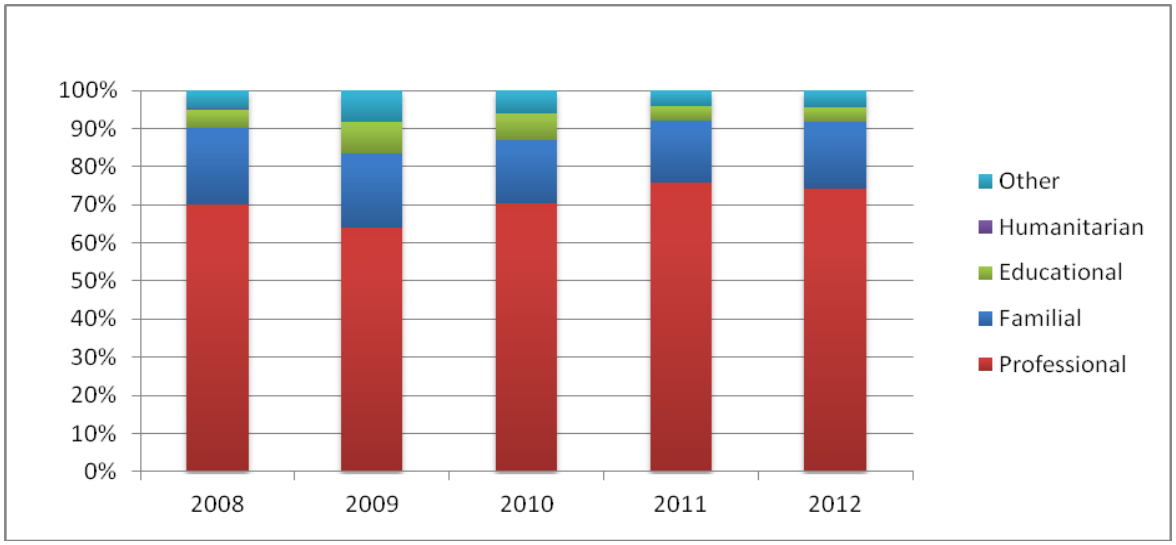
From 2008 until 2012, the number of visa applications for family reasons remained relatively stable with an average of 4,330 per year. The number of educational visa applications differs more: the highest number being 1,812 in 2010 and the lowest 960 in 2012. Visa-seekers for professional reasons constitute the most fluctuating category. The year 2009 saw the lowest number of this kind of visa applications: 12,442 (as compared to 15,817 in 2008 and 18,435 in 2010). In 2011, more than 21,500 Indians applied for work visas. The fluctuations in the economic sector are clearly subject to the economic reality and job opportunities.

It is important to note that the number of applications is a problematic indicator of actual migration. People might apply without being granted a visa or receive a visa without migrating. Furthermore, visa applications include visa-extensions for people who have previously migrated to Belgium. For the

[15] Data available only from 2008 onwards, but given the importance of Indians in the diamond sector we can assume that remunerated activities have been important to the NRI community in Belgium since the 1960s.

purpose of this paper, the data on visa applications serves as an indicator of the different incentives to migrate to Belgium, and the proportion of each category.[16]

**Figure 3. Visa Applications of Indians to Belgium**




Source: Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs.

The actual number of work permits is much lower than the number of applications. Indian employees predominantly receive short-term, renewable "Work Permits B." A "Work Permit B" grants the right to work in Belgium for just one employer for a maximum of 12 months. The permit is granted after application by the employer and can be renewed several times. After four years of legitimate work with a "Work Permit B", the employee can apply for a permit for an indefinite period: a "Work Permit A." The third type, a "Work Permit C" applies to specific categories of migrants, whose stay in Belgium is temporary or uncertain (e.g. students, candidate-refugees, etc.). The numbers of NRIs obtaining unlimited "Work Permits A" and permanent residency after several years of work experience in Belgium is almost non-existent. The number of people working with a "Work Permit C" is also much less significant than those working with a temporary B permit, which is mostly granted to highly qualified employees.

**Table 2. Number of work permits granted per category**

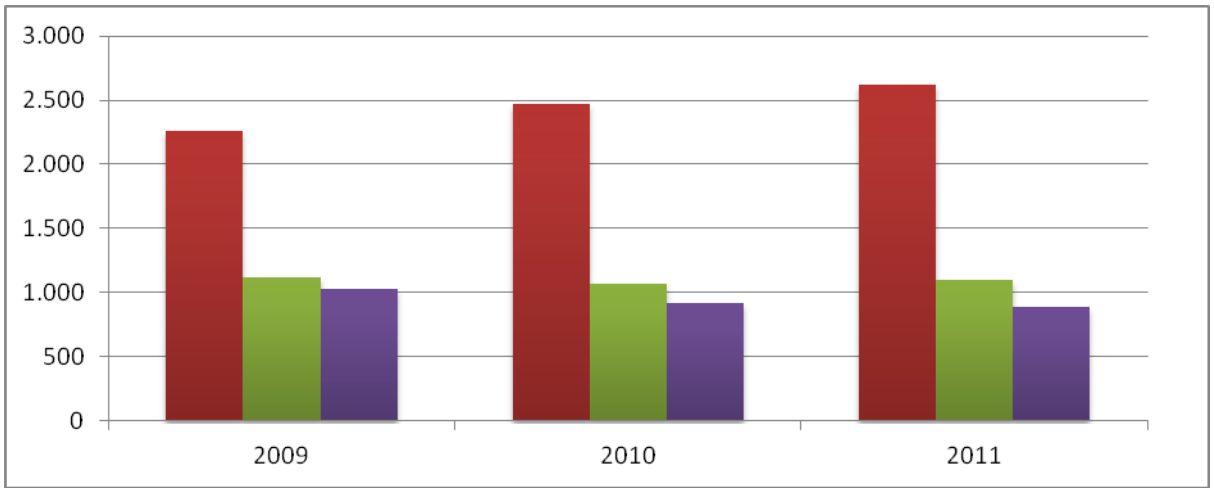
| | Work Permit A | Work Permit B | Work Permit C |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2007** | 1 | 2,169 | 140 |
| **2008** | 0 | 2,922 | 155 |
| **2009** | 0 | 2,393 | 167 |
| **2010** | 0 | 2,729 | 1 |
| **2011** | 2 | 2,830 | 453 |

Source: Belgian Federal Public Service Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue.

[16] Visa Applications can also be divided between short and long stay. That distinction is not reflected in the given figure. Also, information about tourist and transit visas is missing. That category is larger than all others. However, it is debatable whether it is valuable to count it as migration since people who come to Belgium for less than three months are not counted in the migration statistics. The number of applications for Indian tourists has steadily grown, except for the year 2009. To give an idea, almost 22,000 Indians applied for a tourist visa to Belgium in 2012. However, tourist visa applications become important in the light of illegal immigration (cf. infra).

The high amount of work permits granted for highly qualified employees and executives of Indian origin is remarkable. In comparison to the other two nationalities that primarily seek white-collar employment in Belgium, Japan and the U.S.A., the Indian share is striking (see figure 4).[17] Mainly these high numbers are due to Indians' employment in Belgium's diamond sector and the growing involvement in IT and telecommunication-related businesses.[18]

**Figure 4. Highly Qualified and Executive Personnel from India, Japan and the United States.**




Source: Belgian Federal Public Service Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue.

*Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) in Belgium*

Mirroring the NRIs, the number of Belgian nationals of Indian origin (PIOs) has increased significantly from 2001 onwards. In 2001, the Report of the High Level Committee of the Indian Diaspora under supervision of the Ministry of External Affairs claimed the total absence of PIOs in Belgium.[19] The Belgian statistics generated by the Directorate-general Statistics and Economic Information (DGSIE) – available from 2004 until 2007 – show, however, that there was a certain number of PIOs, and that this number gradually rose.[20]

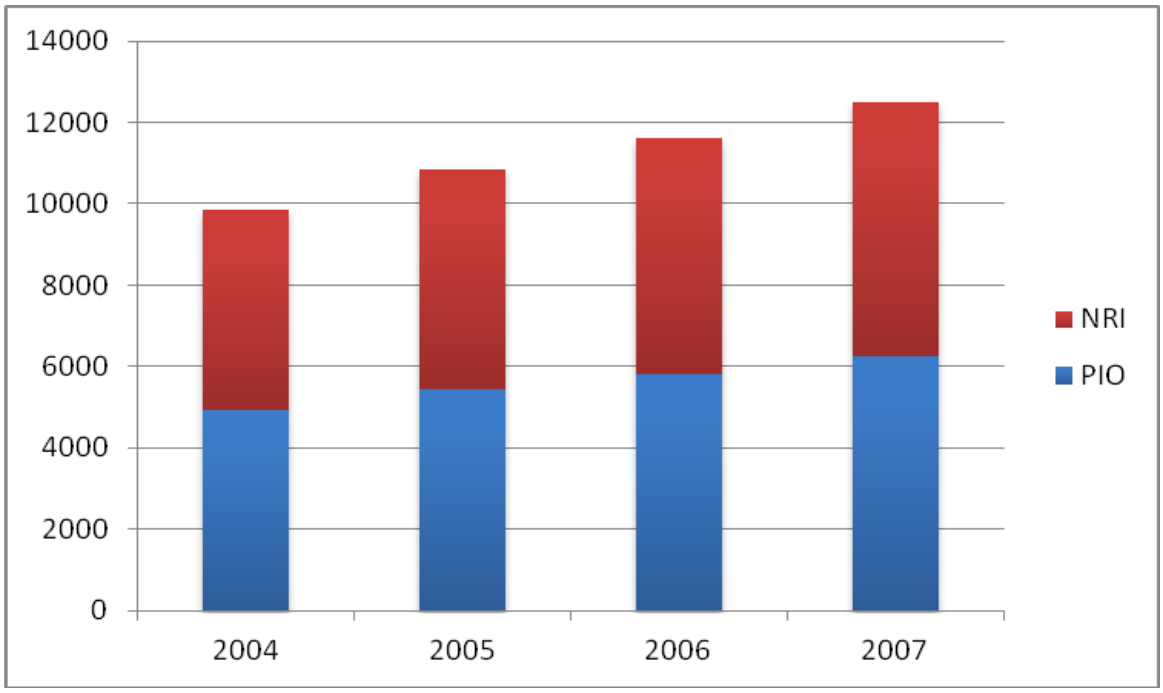
[17] Data on visa applications and work permits in Belgium only available since 2008.

[18] Roos and Cosemans, "Een Reis Langs Vele Wegen. De Indiase Diaspora in België," 215–216; Centrum voor Gelijkheid van Kansen en Racismebetrijding, *Migraties en Migrantenpopulaties in België*, 42.

[19] *The Indian Diaspora*. High Level Committee of the Indian Diaspora, 2001. Accessed 18.09.2013. (http://www.indiandiaspora.nic.in/diasporapdf/part1-est.pdf).

[20] Unfortunately, earlier and later data are currently unavailable, so that it becomes impossible to compare the Indian statistics with the Belgian ones. This gap might be resolved in the near future, as the Directorate-general Statistics and Economic Information is will soon be processing and publishing more data on migration.

**Figure 5. The Indian diaspora in Belgium as divided between NRIs and PIOs.**




Source: National Register – Directorate-general Statistics and Economic Information.

Though the Belgian population of Indian origin increases following the trend of the general foreign population in Belgium, this does not mean that Indian migrants follow all of the general patters. On the contrary, there are large discrepancies between migrant groups. By and large, non-EU foreigners with longstanding ties to Belgium are most likely to adopt Belgian citizenship. EU foreigners (especially EU citizens of the first twelve member states), in contrast, have less of a tendency to obtain Belgian nationality. New migrant groups, to which the Indians belong, have started acquiring Belgian citizenship, but not to the same extent as larger and longer established non-EU migrant populations. Nevertheless, the number of PIOs increases not only because of the acquisition of citizenship but also due to the growing number of children born from (Belgian) parents of Indian origin.[21]

The formation of a group of Belgian nationals of foreign origin is aided by the easing of Belgian citizenship law in several stages. In 1984, a first important change took place, facilitating acquisition of citizenship for children born to a Belgian mother and a foreign father. In 1991, children born on Belgian soil from foreign parents were granted the right to Belgian citizenship.[22] In 1999-2001 new avenues arose for acquiring the Belgian nationality. The process of changing nationality was simplified, accelerating the procedure (referred to as the *Snel-Belg wet*, literally "Quick-Belgian law"). It also lead to "collective appropriations of the Belgian nationality" in which children were granted citizenship at the moment one of their parents adopted the Belgian nationality.[23] In 2013, the law was modified and again restricted the criteria.

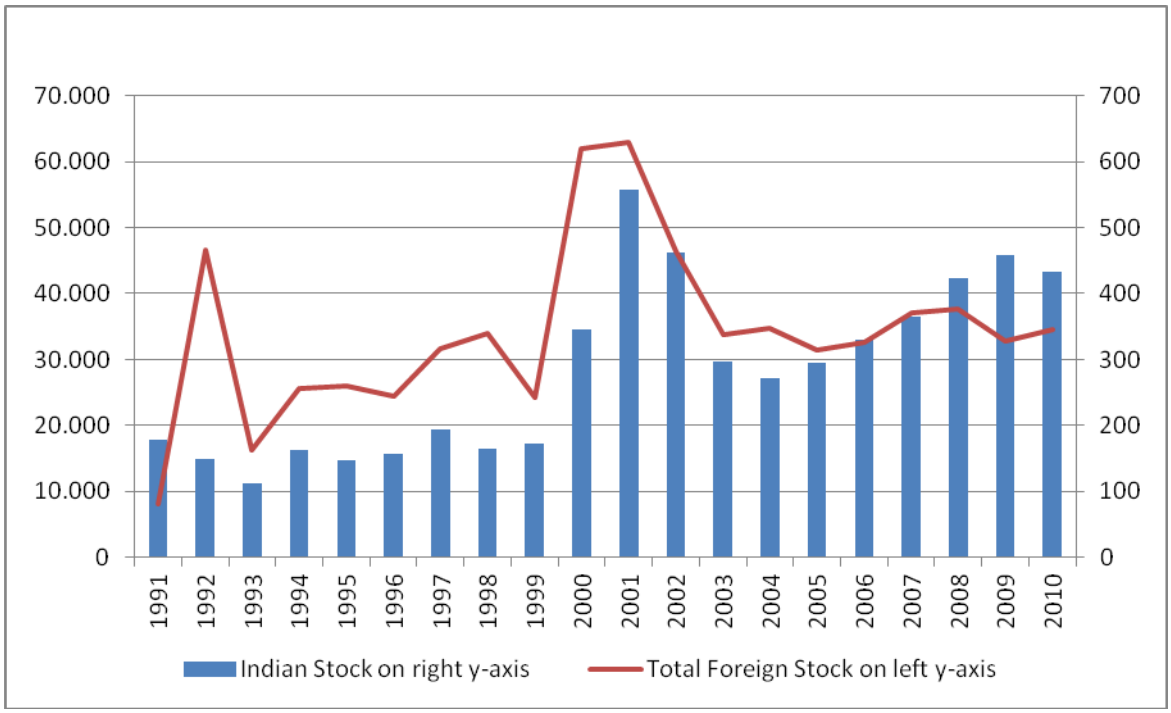
The acquisition of citizenship is thus a process with highs and lows. Indians obtaining Belgian citizenship remained a marginal phenomenon until 2000. The community was too small to benefit from the legal changes in 1984 and 1991, but shows similar tendencies compared to the total foreign population in 2000-2001 – albeit on a much smaller scale.

[21] Centrum voor Gelijkheid van Kansen en Racismebetrijding, *Migraties en Migrantenpopulaties in België*, 156.

[22] Ibid., 105.

[23] Ibid., 120–121.

**Figure 6. Acquisition of citizenship by foreigners and Indians.**




Source: Centrum voor Gelijkheid van Kansen en Racismebetrijding, Migraties en Migrantenpopulaties in België. Statistisch en Demografisch Verslag 2012, p8-11.

*Irregular migration from India to Belgium*

As Perrin et al. explain illegal migration is difficult to measure.[24] There are, however, some indicators that allow for estimations of the number of migrants in residing illegally, especially the registration of irregular migrations by the police and the results of regularization campaigns.[25] Besides these quantitative methods, qualitative field research gives some insights in the profile of "irregular" Indian migrants. All methods of calculating these "hidden" flows and stocks have serious limitations. Police data are highly dependent on police activity and visibility of migrant populations. Groups with a high visibility, such as the Sikhs, are easier and more often arrested than others, leaving misleading traces in the records. Besides, while researchers do have access to records of the Belgian Federal Police, the coefficient to calculate the entire non-regulated population has not yet been determined for Belgium.[26] Regularization campaigns reach an important part of the irregular population, but exclude all immigrants that have entered the country illegally after a certain date (in the Belgian regularization campaign of 2000 the requirement was an uninterrupted stay in Belgium of three to six years).[27] Results from

[24] A note on "illegal" migration: Most migration from India is legal, in the sense that people arrive with legal documents – most often with a tourist visa. Tourist visa make up the largest part of Indian visa applications for Belgium: on average 21,000 applications each year (according to the data of the Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs from 2008 to 2012). "Illegal immigrants" from India are often people who overstay their tourist visa and start working without legal permission. We, therefore, prefer the term "irregular migration" as a denominator to all forms of movement and settlement that fall outside of the regular circuit. This term includes migrants with expired tourist visas (for Belgium and other Schengen countries), people who were denied asylum but remained on Belgian soil, and undocumented migrants.

[25] Ibid., 172–174.

[26] Ibid., 127.

[27] Marie-Claire Foblets, Stephan Parmentier, and Geert Vervaecke, *Wat Denken Personen van Vreemde Origine over Recht En Gerecht in België? Les Populations D'origine Immigrée Face Au Droit En Belgique (Reeks Actuele Problemen Met Betrekking Tot de Sociale Cohesie)* (Gent: Academia, 2004), 103–104.

fieldwork are per definition limited in scope. Nonetheless, when we combine the results of these methods we have to conclude that there is a significant irregular migration flow from India to Belgium.

Irregular migration from India to Belgium comes largely from Punjab and is thus located in regions where most Punjabis have settled – in particular around the Sikh houses of worship or *gurdwaras* in Limburg (Saint-Trond) and the Brussels-Capital Region (Vilvoorde). For the province of Limburg, data exist for both the regularization campaign in 2000 and in 2009.[28] During the regularization of 2000, up to 70% of regularization applications in Saint-Trond belonged to Indians.[29] In 2009, the Yearbook on Migration and Integration in Limburg reported that Indians had filed almost a quarter of all 1,200 applications for regularization. Just as in 2000, most applicants in Limburg were irregular migrants from the region around Saint-Trond.[30]

The regularization campaign of 2000 did not put a stop to irregular migration. Between 2000 and 2009 the illegal flow from India (as well as from other countries) continued. This is clearly reflected in table 3, which shows the police data from that period. In 2008, Indian illegal migrants occupied the third place in police statistics (10%), after Algerians (15%) and Moroccans (13%). In the subsequent years, their numbers dropped considerably – first in relative terms, and after the regularization in 2009, in absolute numbers.

**Table 3. Police data of number of captured Indian nationals with irregular status.**

| | India | Total | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| **2008** | 1,616 | 16,070 | 10.06 |
| **2009** | 1,325 | 17,938 | 7.39 |
| **2010** | 556 | 14,884 | 3.74 |

Source: Centrum voor Gelijkheid van Kansen en Racismebetrijding, Migraties en Migrantenpopulaties in België. Statistisch en Demografisch Verslag 2008-2012.

However, recent fieldwork shows that illegal migration continues to be a common method for Punjabis to enter Belgium. Although family reunification and formation has allowed the Punjabi/Sikh community to grow after the regularization campaign in 2000, the number of people with an illegal status remains high. Since the outbreak of the economic crisis in 2008, a movement of Punjabis from Southern European countries to Belgium became apparent as well. Socio-cultural and religious organizations, especially the four *gurdwaras* in Belgium, play a significant role in providing facilities to Punjabis/Sikhs on the move. Nevertheless, frictions occur between the plight of hospitality and the legal consequences of hosting people in precarious positions. At the height of the economic crisis in 2008 and 2009, local *gurdwaras* became more restrictive in regard to the number of people they provided shelter for in order not to provoke the Belgian authorities.[31]

[28] Numbers for regularization on a national scale are momentarily unavailable.

[29] The total number of applications was only 153, but each application could entail several applicants. The Belgian data does not allow distinguishing the number of applicants. Cosemans, *Meneer Singh En Mevrouw Kaur in België. Migratie, Gender En Integratie in de Sikh-Gemeenschap*, 64.

[30] Bart Daemen et al., *Provinciaal Integratiecentrum Limburg. Jaarboek 2010. Migratie En Integratie in Limburg.* (Hasselt, 2010), 24.

[31] Quincy Cloet, Sara Cosemans, and Idesbald Goddeeris, "Mobility as a Transnational Strategy: Sikhs Moving to and from Belgium," in *Sikhs Across Borders: Transnational Practices of European Sikhs*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen and Kristina Myrvold (London: Continuum Books, 2012), 59–60.

It is important to keep in mind that the Sikhs are the largest Indian community in Belgium, but also the group that is least represented in the statistics, precisely due to the fact that irregular migration is such a prevalent way of reaching Belgium for them. Only at times of regularization do we see the statistics catching up with actual numbers of Indian residents in Belgium.

## 3. Profile of Indian migrants in Belgium

*Age*

Table 4 shows that the Indian population in Belgium covers all age groups, with some minor representation among people younger than 15 years and older than 65. With regard to the active working population, three observations are noteworthy. First, the 1970s was a period in which mostly families migrated to Belgium. The number of children corresponds very closely to the number of adults in the period. It links up with the fact that Belgium became a country of refuge for Indian expellees from Uganda (1972).

Secondly, between 1981 and 1991, the active population more than doubled, while the number of children decreased. The reasons for the great disparity in numbers are twofold. On the one hand, it reflects the nature of migration and follows the general trend during the 1980s and 1990s, in which Belgium saw the migration of single adults increase.[32] On the other hand, it is also a legal issue. In 1990, the Belgian government set the line between minors and adults at the age of 18. Before that date, people of 15 years and older were considered adults in Belgium. However, the census report of 1991 does not take this legal change into account until 2000, keeping the divide between children and adults at the age of fifteen.

Thirdly, from 2000 onwards, the active population increased even more rapidly while the amount of children and elderly rose, as well. This is mainly owing to the regularization of 2000. The regulation not only allowed for a more accurate representation of the actual migrant population, but it also resulted in a larger share of families migrating. Also, the option of family reunification allowed for the migration of elderly parents of migrants. However, for the Indian migrant community the active adult population remains the most important.

**Table 3. Indian population in Belgium divided according to age.**

| | **≤14 years** | **15-64 years** | **≥65 year** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1970** | 275 | 518 | 41 |
| **1981** | 680 | 775 | 12 |
| **1991** | 630 | 1,996 | 17 |
| | **≤17 years** | **18-64 years** | **≥65 year** |
| **2000** | 697 | 2,649 | 54 |
| **2005** | 925 | 4,278 | 97 |

Source: Reports of the Censuses 1981 and 1991 - National Register – Directorate-general Statistics and Economic Information.

[32] Nationaal instituut voor de statistiek, *Algemene Volks- En Woningtelling Op 1 Maart 1991*, vol. Huishoudens en gezinnen (Brussel: Nationaal Instituut voor de Statistiek, 1992), 33.

*Sex and Marital Status*

Like all new immigrant groups in Belgium, the Indian community consists predominantly of men. Between 1961 and 2005 the masculinity index (number of males for every 100 females) was 138 on average. The most important variations occurred between 1981 and 1991. Whereas in 1981 the male-female ratio was almost in balance (a masculinity index of 101) the masculinity index in 1991 had risen to its highest point, 173. Once again, this evolution stresses the importance of the period between 1980 and 1990 for Indian migration to Belgium.

**Table 4. Indian population in Belgium divided according to sex in absolute and relative numbers.**

| | Male | Male % | Female | Female % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1961** | 66 | 59.46 | 45 | 40.54 |
| **1970** | 340 | 55.83 | 269 | 44.17 |
| **1981** | 738 | 50.31 | 729 | 49.69 |
| **1991** | 1675 | 63.37 | 968 | 36.63 |
| **2000** | 1,972 | 58.00 | 1,428 | 42.00 |
| **2005** | 3,114 | 58.75 | 2,186 | 41.25 |

Source: Reports of the Censuses 1981 and 1991 - National Register – Directorate-general Statistics and Economic Information.

Since 1991, the number of female migrants has increased, however without completely restoring the sex balance. When comparing the Indian diaspora with older migrant communities in Belgium, it is likely that with the growth of the community the male-female rate will normalize.

When looking at the marital status of Indians in Belgium, we see that the group of married migrants has grown more rapidly than the group of single migrants (including children). The period between 1981 and 1991 again appears to be a turning point in which the number of married migrants surpassed the number of single migrants. Interestingly, in the 1980s the number of female single migrants was higher than the number of male single migrants – a situation that has not occurred since. This can be related to the relative high number of children in comparison to the number of adults (see table 3).

**Table 5. Marital status among the Indian population in Belgium divided per sex (No sex specific data for 1991).**

| | Single | | | Married | | | Widowed | | | Divorced | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M | F | T | M | F | T | M | F | T | M | F | T |
| **1981** | 453 | 518 | 971 | 283 | 200 | 483 | 1 | 11 | 12 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| **1991** | / | / | 1136 | / | / | 1440 | / | / | 37 | / | / | 29 |
| **2000** | 935 | 576 | 1511 | 960 | 810 | 1770 | 9 | 32 | 41 | 68 | 10 | 78 |
| **2005** | 1498 | 708 | 2206 | 1544 | 1425 | 2970 | 10 | 39 | 49 | 62 | 13 | 75 |

Source: Reports of the Censuses 1981 and 1991 - National Register – Directorate-general Statistics and Economic Information.

In 2000 and certainly in 2005, most female migrants were married, while the number of single men increases at a more rapid pace. Furthermore, widowed status is more common in the female population whereas most divorced Indians in Belgium are male. It is important to repeat that migrants with an

irregular status are never included in these numbers. Qualitative research shows that the number of female migrants with an irregular status in Belgium is very low. This means that for the most part the figures for male migrants are distorted, while the figures for female migrants are quite accurate. In reality, the number of single men must be higher than the statistics suggest.[33]

Marriages are mostly endogamous, i.e. concluded between partners from the same caste, social class and region. Intercultural marriages remain rare, though they happened more frequently in the past among a particular group of people: Sikh refugees who had left Punjab in the 1980s and early 1990s without finding refuge in Belgium. There are several known cases of intercultural couples with children of mixed origin. However, none of these marriages has persisted to the present day.[34]

That being said, young Indian professionals (in the ICT sector and others) are growing more independent from traditions: an increasing number of them make their own decisions regarding relationships. They do not uncritically accept the system of arranged marriages and are open to divorces and premarital relationships.

With regard to caste, there is almost no official data for caste in the Indian diaspora in Belgium – mainly because the two largest groups, the Jains and the Sikhs, have formally renounced caste. However, marriages take place along caste lines, and even in the Sikh *gurdwaras* a certain division between the two largest castes (the jats and the lobanas) is existent.[35] The Jains appear to be more unified when it comes to worship. However, caste distinctions are also prevalent amongst them. The caste profile of the newly arrived, young professionals is more diverse.[36]

## 3. Cultural and Religious Life

Religion is one of the major forums where Indians in Belgium meet and celebrate their identity. Several religions are represented in Belgium, but particularly Sikhs, Jains, Hindus, and Christians have developed their own networks. In spite of their common Indian background, they hardly interact with each other. On the contrary, even within one religion, there are sometimes fights and splits.

Sikhs are a prime example of this internal strife. The first official *gurdwara* or Sikh temple of Belgium, the Gurdwara Sangat Sahib, was established in 1993 in Halmaal, a small hamlet southwest of Sint-Truiden. This was a logical consequence of the growing Sikh presence in the region from the 1980s onwards. The same applies to the new gurdwaras: the Guru Nanak Sahib Cultural Centre in Vilvoorde near Brussels (1999) and the Gurdwara Sahib in Liège (2005). Both derived from the growing spread of Sikhs in other parts of the country. In 2006, however, the new Gurdwārā Guru Ram Das Sikh Study and Cultural Centre was founded in Hoepertingen near Borgloon, only ten kilometers from Halmaal, Sint-Truiden. It resulted from internal clashes between personalities, generations (and moments and circumstances of migration, e.g. between economic migrants in the early 1980s and political refugees in the 1990s), religious dogmas and traditions (e.g. about particular verses in the sacred script or about the acceptance or rejections of sants – living saints), and castes (jat Sikhs or landowners versus lobana Sikhs or merchants).[37]

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[33] Sara Cosemans, "Sikhs in Haspengouw. Migratie En Integratie Vanuit Een Vrouwelijk Perspectief" (Unpublished MA Thesis, KU Leuven, 2011), 82.

[34] Cosemans, *Meneer Singh En Mevrouw Kaur in België. Migratie, Gender En Integratie in de Sikh-Gemeenschap*, 57–58.

[35] Ibid., 68–69.

[36] Chris De Lauwer, "De Shri Shankheshwar Parshvanath Jain Derasar in Wilrijk," in *Het Wiel van Ashoka. Belgisch-Indiase Contacten in Historisch Perspectief*, ed. Idesbald Goddeeris (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2013), 239.

[37] Sara Cosemans, Quincy Cloet, and Idesbald Goddeeris, "Migratie En Interne Breuklijnen: Sikhs in België," in *Migratie. Winnaars En Verliezers*, ed. Michèle Morel and Cedric Ryngaert (Leuven: Acco, 2011), 97–110.

These gurdwaras are settled in regular houses, the interior of which was given Punjabi flavors and Sikh attributes. The Jains in Antwerp, by contrast, built their own temple. The Shri Shankheshwar Parshvanath Jain Derasar in Wilrijk is the first Jain temple on the European continent and one of the biggest Jain shrines outside India. It takes comprises 3000 m² and consists of a temple of 300 m² and a cultural center of 1000 m². The first stone was laid in 1996, and the whole complex was solemnly inaugurated in 2010. The edifice was inspired by North Indian temples from the 10th to the 15th century, and constructed by Indian workers along traditional guidelines. It does not contain cement or iron, and consists of large stacked marble blocks. The highest shikara, or pyramid tower, is 25 meters high. The temple is full of religious symbols and is the place of individual and collective worshipping of the Belgian Jains. It is administered by the Jain Cultural Centre Antwerp, which consists of twelve diamond dealers.[38]

Hindus also have their own places of worship. These are younger and geographically spread. In Antwerp, there is the nondescript BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir. It was established in October 2003 and since 2007 has organized an annual Ganesh festival. Hindus in Brussels founded a Hindu Committee, purchased an office space in 2012 and turned it into a Hindu shrine. The place may become a hub of Hindu activity in the Belgian capital.[39] In other cities, Hindus occasionally convene for religious festivals. In the university city of Leuven, for instance, Indian students celebrate Holi, Divali, and occasional pujas in auditoriums of the university and its colleges.

These Indian students are associated in the Indian Students Association Leuven (ISAL), which was founded in 1972. Initially, it was a Christian-based association, which celebrated masses according to the different South Indian rites, particularly the Syro-Malabar. The KU Leuven – which was a Catholic university until 2012 and has not entirely given up this religious identity – has indeed attracted many Christian students from India, predominantly from Kerala. In the 1970s, there were a couple dozen Indians, and more than half of them were registered at the faculty of Theology. However, over the past decade, the number of Indian – and other foreign – students in Leuven skyrocketed. Since 2001-02, there have consistently been more than 100 Indian students, and since 2009-10 more than 300. Theology remains an important faculty – attracting 42% of the students in 2010 – but more and more students now train in business, engineering, and pharmaceutical sciences. This has affected ISAL. Between 2005 and 2006, Christian Indians left the student organization, which was taken over by Hindus from the other faculties. They state to be open to all religions, but they fail to attract their Christian compatriots to their Divali and Holi festivals. As a result, the latter established a new organization in 2008-09: the Leuven-Indian Forum for Theology (LIFT).[40]

## 4. Media Perception of the Indian Community

The Indian diaspora in Belgium does not receive much attention from the Belgian media. On occasion South Asian migrants make the headlines. This is generally caused by concrete events and framed in a negative light. However, all in all, media focus on Indian immigrants is eclipsed by attention to other migrant groups who are even more associated with problems.

Sikhs have mostly been associated with human smuggling and illegal stays and work. Articles run on their overcrowded, poor housing conditions in premises that are officially declared to be unfit for use but are nevertheless rented out by slumlords. They also cover police raids in gurdwaras and arrests of Sikhs without proper documentation. In spite of the fact that Sikhs are mostly represented as an ethnical group rather than a religious community (their name is often spelled with a cap, while

[38] De Lauwer, "De Shri Shankheshwar Parshvanath Jain Derasar in Wilrijk."

[39] Roos and Cosemans, "Een Reis Langs Vele Wegen. De Indiase Diaspora in België," 224–228.

[40] Jan-Kornelis Boon, "Reconstructie van de Indiase Studentenpopulatie Aan de KU Leuven (1970-2000)" (Unpublished MA Thesis, KU Leuven, 2013).

religious groups are spelled with a small letter in Dutch), they are also often connected to religious issues. In 2004 and 2009, there were debates about their kirpan or dagger – one of their religious attributes. Three Sikhs were first sentenced, but later acquitted on appeal. In 2000, 2004, and 2009, there were debates about the turban in public places. In 2009, the Flemish government banned the headscarf from schools, and Sikhs protested against the fact that this also applied to their turbans. Sikhs also made the headlines in July 2010, when a Belgian Sikh girl who dated a Sikh boy from a different caste was killed by her relatives during a holiday in Punjab.

By and large, the coverage is superficial and biased. Belgian journalists do not show much empathy for the Sikhs (nor other Indian immigrants). They only take interviews from Belgian experts and never give the floor to Sikhs themselves. They tend to exaggerate and generalize problems and do not reflect on the fact that, for instance, large strata of the Sikh population do not wear a turban and/or severely condemn the aforementioned of honor killing.[41]

However, an even more important conclusion is the lack of attention and knowledge. A study of the Belgian press between November 2011 and October 2012 reveals that the Indian diaspora was not mentioned even once. This fits with the general coverage of India, which is given far less attention than China. When Belgian newspapers do mention India, the focus is largely on economic themes or classic stereotypes and bizarre phenomena. When Osama Bin Laden was killed in May 2011, the Flemish state TV news (VRT) went on the street to get the reactions of Belgian Muslims. They did not realize that two of their four interviewees were Sikhs (who did not know that they were represented as Muslims).[42]

## 5. Socio-cultural Integration of the Indian Population

Almost no data is available on the socio-cultural integration of Indian migrants in the Belgian society. Overall, one has the impression that Indian interaction with the host society is limited: the Sikhs' remarkable identity markers set them apart from the host society, Indian diamond traders live concentrated in the highly guarded *Square Mile* – the Antwerp diamond enclave, and the ICT and other young professionals are transient sojourners in Belgium. The latter two groups appear to be more integrated with the larger worldwide Indian diaspora and with increasingly transnational migrant networks. Still, the Indian communities are more embedded in Belgium than one might think. The Jains highly invest in their community in Antwerp, practicing their culture and religion in a Belgian context and raising funds for projects in the host society.[43] Moreover, research in the Sikh community has shown that longer residence in Belgium has resulted in an increased participation in various sectors of society, ranging from the job market to higher education.

However, it is important to take intersections of generation, class and gender into consideration in order to understand inter-community differences. The most 'successfully integrated' Sikhs appear to be former refugees from Uganda, who arrived in Belgium with the experience of being the 'middle layer' in the African society, between the British and the African. They had belonged to the (higher or lower) middle class in Africa and maintained that position, despite the fact that they had lost all their belongings during the expulsion. In the group that migrated from India, there are more variations. Most of the Sikh men who arrived between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s were educated in India. They belong today to the more wealthy section of the Belgian Sikh society, owning property and/or businesses. Their wives and children joined small numbers of them in the early period. These women have gained important positions in the community, and have often interacted with the host society quite extensively through their jobs. Their children, however, are the ones that have most successfully

[41] Quincy Cloet, "Sikhs in België. Beeldvorming En Zelfperceptie" (Unpublished MA Thesis, KU Leuven, 2011).

[42] Idesbald Goddeeris and Elwin Hofman, "European Perceptions of India: A Belgian/Flemish Angle," *FPRC Journal* no. 13 (2013): 321–326.

[43] Cf. infra: Remittances and ties with India.

integrated into the Belgian host society: in particular the girls excel in higher education, earning degrees from Belgium's most prestigious universities. The boys' profile is more mixed, with some of them pursuing higher education, and most of them entering the job market as soon as possible after high school.

This picture differs significantly from that of the later migrants – especially the women and children who have arrived in Belgium for family reunification. Their exposure to the host society has been shorter, resulting in an especially lower degree of participation in it by most women. Children's participation and integration into the host society is largely related to their family background and the access to education. Interestingly, it is in this group that the researchers first noted interest in participating in the host society's politics. Again, it was a young woman of a middle class family, Palwinder Kaur, who took the lead. In the municipal elections of 2012 she ran for city council for the socialist party (sp.a). A middle-aged Sikh shop owner, Aftar Singh, followed her initiative. He ran (ironically) for the Christian-democrat party (CD&V). His participation showed above all the political disparities inside the Sikh community, but also their growing interest in establishing their political position in Belgium.

The most recently arrived migrants have very different backgrounds. Since 2000, the Belgian Sikh community saw the arrival of an increasing amount of low-educated single young men. In the last decade, they have also started settling down, some of them establishing new families. This group has much more difficulty integrating, partially because the Sikh population in Belgium has grown large and the incentive to interact with the society outside of the own community has diminished.[44]

It is still too early to see the effect of the growing community on the youngest generation, but it is notable that young children have more difficulties coping with the education system. They become easy victims to the so-called "waterfall system" in Belgian education, that is, a system in which types of education are ranked from (being perceived as) high to low – high being the general courses that prepare students for higher education and low being vocational training. Despite the high quality of Belgian education, migrant children are more likely to end up at the bottom of this hierarchy – the system thus reproducing social inequality and foreclosing opportunities for successful integration.[45]

## 6. Remittances and ties with India

In 2012, India was the largest receiver of official remittances from Belgium – Indian migrants sent about $71 billion USD home. It was followed by China and the Philippines, respectively.[46] This is different from the evolutions in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when Turkish and Moroccan migrants were still sending most (official) remittances home. Research of Tom De Bruyn points out that the channels chosen by Indian migrants in Belgium to send money home vary between the communities, also depending on the amount sent and the purpose of the remitted money. The remittance patterns of Sikhs in the agricultural sector and small-scale business obviously differ greatly from those of the Jains in the diamond trade. The former are more likely to choose for informal and low-cost *hawala* systems whereas the latter are more likely to use official channels, such as banks and wiring services.[47] Moreover, the destination of the money is also different. In the case of the Sikhs, apart from individual remittances to kin and local community, there are also collections held to support causes in and for their 'homeland'. Collections to support the creation of an independent state, Khalistan, are less

[44] Cosemans, "Sikhs in Haspengouw. Migratie En Integratie Vanuit Een Vrouwelijk Perspectief," 87–90.

[45] Nico Hirtt, Ides Nicaise, and Dirk De Zutter, *De school van de ongelijkheid.* (Berchem: EPO-2008, 2007).

[46] "Migranten sturen 300 miljard naar huis," Metro, 4 October 2013.

[47] Tom De Bruyn and Patrick Develtere, *Het Potentieel van de Diasporafilantropie : Onderzoek Naar Het Geefgedrag van Belgische Migrantengemeenschappen (unpublished Version of 31 October 2007)* (Koning Boudewijnstichting Brussel, 2008), 20–25.

common and more covert in the Belgian Sikh community, but the gathering of donations for specific Sikh charity projects, such as the support for the 'Widows Colony' (formed in West-Delhi's Tilak Vihar, after the 1984 pogroms against Sikhs in Delhi) have been important moments of bonding for the community that formed as a result of communal clashes in the 1980s.[48]

The diamond traders, on the other hand, are able to remit larger quantities of money for various purposes. The Jains have formed hometown associations (HTAs), such as the Antwerp Indian Association, that promote development back in India. However, these are not hometown associations in a pure form, as they also sponsor projects in Antwerp, such as local hospitals and schools. A special reference needs to be made to Rose vzw (a vzw being a non-profit organization). This organization can be seen as a hometown association and is run by Indian students in Leuven to support educational projects for children in low-resource areas in over 15 Indian states. The organization came into being in 2001 and gained public attention after the tsunami of 2004, allowing it to grow considerably. They collect donations among the students other sources, including the university and sometimes by Indian businessmen.[49] These different experiences with remittances show that connections to India are shaped by the migration experience, as well as the position of migrants in the host society.

[48] Interviews Sara Cosemans.

[49] De Bruyn and Develtere, *Het Potentieel van de Diasporafilantropie*, 35 & 43.

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